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ABSTRACT

This paper proposes a framework for the management of time, under the rubric of "SOS" (Self-Organization-Scheduling), designed specifically for school officials. Underlying this framework is a belief that, in order to manage time, one must manage oneself within the bounds of the institution. Accordingly, three interdependent sets of practical suggestions are provided, in keeping with the threefold "SOS" sequence. The first component, self-awareness and self-discipline, entails documenting the activities of a normal work week and critically assessing this logbook for the appropriateness of the time devoted to each kind of activity. The second, organizational awareness, involves an assessment of individual time management in the context of ongoing organizational concerns and requirements--a synchronization of the organization and the individual. The third component, scheduling, involves planning, timetabling, implementing, and monitoring tasks for the organization as a whole. References are included. (TE)

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SOS:

A TIME MANAGEMENT FRAMEWORK

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SOS: A TIME MANAGEMENT FRAMEWORK

OVERVIEW

The purpose of this article is to propose a framework for the management of time, under the rubric of 'SOS', for those individuals working specifically within social-serving institutions such as schools. In addition, some practical suggestions are put forward, but with the intention of reinforcing this helping framework, rather than a prescriptive or normative attitude. The acronym, moreover, attempts to encapsulate succinctly the three sequential and interdependent groups of recommendations listed below:

1. S (Self)--self-awareness and self-discipline or control;
2. O (Organization)--organizational awareness and a synchronization of both the institution and the individual; and
3. S (Scheduling)--planning, timetabling, implementing, and monitoring organizational tasks.

INTRODUCTION

The turbulent 1980's has seen a resurgence of interest in the topic of time management, which originated in an early period of organizational theory, the scientific approach to management. Several reasons are postulated for this refocus. One, now attention is being directed towards an improvement in the quality of work life. With the bulk of the population, the reasonably well-educated post-war baby boomers, reaching middle-age, the concern is not for obtaining jobs, but improving the work experience. Consequently, a recognition and a reduction of work-related stress has been recommended. Or, in other

words, there is a need for both stress and stressor management (Hiebert, 1985). And in jobs such as teaching, where the largest and most consistent factor contributing to teacher stress has been identified as time or, more specifically, a lack of time to do the multiplicity of tasks required (Klas, 1984), time management becomes even more crucial to the quality of work life.

A second reason for a recurrence of the subject of time management may be because of a general institutional concern for better, (that is, more effective and efficient), resource management, where time appears to be accepted begrudingly as one of those resources. Commonly, the resources have been identified as the three m's: men, machines, and money. More correctly and completely, however, Beer (1979) and others specified them as human resources, machines (the technology and the capital and operational equipment or physical resources), money (fiscal resources), information (constraints, contingencies, and conditions) (Thompson, 1967), and time, that intangible substance. The current era with a paucity of resources has forced organizations, and especially those not-for-profit publically-financed ones, to assume more visibility through a greater public accountability. Organizational viability appears to be contingent upon a more efficient and effective use of resources. And, as Drucker (1973) has pointed out repeatedly, time is our scarcest resource; it is available and apportioned to all equally and, as such, how it is utilized becomes critical. Time must come under the control of the user, not control the user. In other words, time, in addition to the other more common resources, must be managed and managed well.

Many articles, texts, and even films abound offering practical advice on how to manage time and consequently control stress while on the job. Unfortunately, those sources have failed to differentiate among organizations, resulting in the advice being recommended and applied indiscriminately, regardless of the type of institution. Institutions which have been termed as 'people-processing' (Hasenfeld, 1972) or social-serving are different from other production-type profit-oriented organizations, however, as Newman and Wallender (1979) have documented. Concomitantly, those differences should be upheld by distinctive advice.

One of the differences which Newman and Wallender listed was that social-service organizations, such as schools, have multiple and often conflicting goals. Teachers, for example, have argued continuously that they have too much to do, and insufficient time (Klaus, 1984) to accomplish the objectives that are themselves continuously changing, due to changing public demands. While Hiebert and Farber (1984) would contend that little empirical support exists for the prevalent view that teaching is a highly stressful job, they acknowledge that such a group may require more appropriate coping skills. Certainly, staff burnout in the helping professions is a reality, and has been attributed in part to a lack of time (Schug, 1983). Ashkenas and Schaffer (1982), have pointed out, however, that a lack of time management skills (such as scheduling), and not a lack of time per se, has resulted in tasks being ignored or partially incomplete.

The point to be made is that the social-service institutions, such as schools and libraries, are sufficiently different to merit a somewhat altered approach toward the subject of managing time. For example,

texts such as those by Mackenzie (1975, 1972) and Lakein (1973) state that employees should be able to control or eliminate many of the interruptions on the job. In contrast, though, in people-processing organizations such as schools, interruptions are an intrinsic part of the job. Teachers requesting assistance from their principal, students wanting help from a librarian, and a child seeking a response from a teacher are all examples of interruptions, albeit perhaps often routine. These interruptions cannot be put 'on hold' as can letters or even telephone calls; rather, such requests must be acted upon with alacrity and enthusiasm, so that the employee is indeed conveying to the user, (e.g., the principal to the teacher, the principal to the parent, the teacher to the student), that the underlying organizational philosophy of "people are our business," as observed by Peters and Waterman (1982), is more than just an empty expression.

To summarize, educators identify themselves as being under stress, which they attribute to, rightly or wrongly, a lack of time. They require some assistance in the technique of planning and in a more appropriate (efficient and effective) use of their time within the unique educational working environment. This article, synthesizing the documented research and the author's field work, attempts to address those time management needs of educational personnel, recognizing that only certain aspects of organizational life can be controlled, other aspects can be actively adapted to. Underlying the entire SOS framework is a belief that, in order to manage time, one must manage oneself within the bounds of the institution. Rather than resisting or reacting to the organization, then, the time or self-manager must not only interact or act in a proactive manner, but also acquire and apply some

planning techniques to the job.

The remainder of this article will explore the SOS framework by expanding upon its three constitutent parts: S--self, O--organization, and S--scheduling. To provide a skeletal overview, self, the first component, refers to the identification, assessment, and regulation of activities which comprise an individual's typical work period. The second factor, organization, refers to the necessity to gain an understanding and an appreciation of the work ebb and flow, i.e., the times within the normal workday or work week which are conducive to quiet work, versus the times when interruptions prevail, so that a match can be effected between individual needs and organizational demands. And the third factor, scheduling, refers to the necessity for the individual to begin to plan and schedule the larger, more difficult, or more complicated tasks which require some reflection. Such are the components of the SOS framework.

S--SELF

The first of the three components, the first S in SOS, consists of the following two steps: one, self-awareness--what the individual is doing within the work period and when these different types of activities are being performed; and then two, self-control--implying that self-monitoring and some self-discipline may be required in order to reach the objective of not working longer and harder, but rather making more effective use of time spent on the job.

a) Self-awareness. If time management is, essentially, management of self, then self-awareness or, as Socrates said, "To know thyself" is precursive to time management. Indeed, self-awareness is the common

first step of most programs aimed at self-development. Hence, it is not unusual to begin mananagement training programs with the completion and subsequent assessment of a self-inventory.

The initial step in self-awareness is to document a normal work week. Mackenzie (1975) recommends that a log of each 15-minute work period be kept for the course of a week. As this document will become the basis for self-analysis, accuracy is imperative. To meet this objective, activities should be recorded throughout the day, rather than once, in retrospect, at the day's end. Also, all activities should be listed, detailing interruptions such as personal telephone calls, coffee breaks, socializing, day-dreaming, as well as the normal work-related activities.

A critical appraisal of this logbook is the next step, in order to provide answers to the following categories of questions: One, what different types of activities or tasks (i.e., quiet, reflective tasks versus routine tasks) are ongoing, and when? Two, when do 'interruptions' occur, i.e., when are others making demands of the individual's time? And conversely, when are there lulls in the work week or occasions when the clients are not making demands upon the individual? Three, what activities could be considered as an inappropriate or an ineffective use of time? Why? Which of those activities are exogenous? Endogenous? (Exogenous activities are identified as tasks which are externally generated by events or by other people. In comparison, endogenous activities are those which are generated internally by the individual.) And finally, has any time been allocated for planning?

Responses to questions in the first category should reveal that at least two distinct types of tasks are being performed in the course of a work week. For simplicity's sake, these tasks have been grouped as either type A or type B tasks. Type A tasks are non-routine activities, rather complex, and hence demand periods of quiet reflection rather than constant interruptions for their successful completion. Indeed, perhaps this activity may have even been written down on the individual's work record as "planning to do -----". Writing a paper, diagnosing an uncommon ailment, developing a policy statement, establishing procedures for library archival access, are all examples of what have been termed as type A tasks. Too often, unfortunately, they are ignored or only completed in part because of their perceived difficulty, a lack of time, or a proliferation of, or a higher priority assigned to, type B tasks (Ashkenas & Schaffer, 1982).

These latter tasks, type B, are those which are more routine, perhaps even mundane, and which have become a normal or integral part of work. They are relatively straight-forward tasks and, as such, require little innovative thinking or decision-making; tasks that are often quite brief in their completion time; tasks that are often termed as urgent; tasks that are recurring; and tasks that are a necessary, but not a necessarily stimulating, part of the work life. Examples of such tasks are marking papers, completing travel claims, washing a patient, checking for overdue books, carrying out a library search. These more routine tasks are not always generated or initiated by the employee; yet they form the backbone of the individual's job. Moreover, these type B tasks can be further distinguished by the common, albeit somewhat disparaging, nomenclature of 'busy work' or 'administrivia', alluding to

a more paper-oriented task; and those 'interruptions' which are often people-generated tasks. While these former paper-oriented tasks can be shunted aside for a certain period of time, the latter people-oriented tasks often must be dealt with immediately.

And on the other hand, a lack of attention to or a partial completion of A-type tasks indicates that the final S in SOS is not being addressed. For effective time management, it is recommended that the skills involved in the planning and scheduling of the more complex activities required within the organization to ensure their implementation and timely completion be not only learned, but also used. An overabundance of B-type activities may point out that a rethinking of priorities is required in order to begin to regulate those activities that were considered, initially, as uncontrollable.

Responses to questions in category two lead into the second component, the O in SOS, the identification of the typical pattern or work-flow in 'open door' institutions.

And the third category of responses should reveal those activities upon which time has not be spent wisely. Such activities have been referred to as time-wasters. A close appraisal of both these internally and externally-generated activities may demonstrate, as Mackenzie's research confirmed, that by imposing some self-discipline or self-control, the user may reduce, if not eliminate entirely, many of those time-wasters. What may have appeared, at first, to be exogenous and uncontrollable tasks are recognized through this analysis as being endogenous and hence controllable interruptions.

b) Self-monitoring. Consultants such as Lakein and Mackenzie contend that, if the goal is time management, the following practices should become habitual :

1. Three administrative activities are recommended initially: one, the physical separation of papers delineating type A and B activities; two, the maintenance and updating of a list of these tasks; and three, the immediate documentation of deadlines or of the required completion dates, if known, on the one master planning calendar. Centralization of this information is imperative to avoid unrealistic task commitments.

2. The final fifteen minutes of each day should be assigned for the planning of the following day's activities. Both type A and B tasks should be included, if at all possible. And this list should remain on the desk as a blatant reminder in the morning.

3. Interruptions should be minimized by establishing some office norms--for example, opening of the office door when carrying out B-type activities, in contrast to maintaining a closed door for A-type activities; or adjusting one's desk or chair to avoid visual contact, and hence unnecessary chatter, with those casual passers-by.

4. A task, once started, should be carried out to completion, even if it means staying late (but only on a rare occasion). Several implications are embedded in this statement. One, tasks should be broken down into smaller, shorter, and generally more managable sub-tasks. Two, the individual can then assign an amount of time considered appropriate for the completion of each of those tasks or sub-tasks. Three, 'guestimations' of time-on-task assigned prior to the task being carried out should be revised accordingly after the task is completed; moreover, both times should be recorded in the time log.

5. The completion and analysis of the time log should be carried out every few months, in order maintain the 'Hawthorne effect', that is the process of self-awareness, self-monitoring, and hence self-development for a more effective management of time. These documents should be kept so that the actual time spent on a particular task can be referred to at a later date. Such a procedure may avoid unrealistic target dates or, more to the point, unrealistic expectations of oneself or one's employees.

Thus, the identification, analysis, evaluation, and monitoring of oneself is the preliminary step for effective management of self and, hence, for that of time. Logically, that stage leads into the next one, the merging or integration of the individual's activities with that of the organization.

O--ORGANIZATION

The second element in the SOS framework is the O, representing the organization. First, the individual must become acutely aware of the 'pulse' of the organization and the general work patterns of that part of the organization which is particularly relevant. In essence, one is actively partitioning the intra-organizational environment into a more immediate, more relevant one, creating what Weick (1977) has referred to as one's "enacted environment." For a librarian, for example, knowing the daily or weekly periods when the library's resources are in high demand should provide some guidance as to how the librarian's time must be, even in part, structured. Then, with that information, an individual can begin to schedule the enactment of type A and B tasks.

Rather than working or attempting to work against the flow of the organization, the individual is advised to take an active role by adapting or adjusting the work plan to harmonize with the organization. Referring to the library once again for clarification, if it is not sustaining heavy use on, perhaps, a Monday morning, then that period may be suitable for carrying out an A-type task.

Another example is offered in order to demonstrate the synchronization that must occur between the individual and the institution. The principal of an elementary school in the Northwest Territories sought advice on how to improve the school climate, or the relationship between himself and his teachers. To obtain some data, two time logs were completed: one on the principal, and the second to record the general schedule of the teachers. The principal had enforced a quiet period for himself during the first two hours of the morning (from 7:30-9:30 a.m.) in order to tackle the tasks associated with his job, of both A and B types; he considered himself as a 'morning person', and hence thought that he could make the best use of his time then. For the remainder of the day, the principal maintained an open-door policy, to include "walking about" the halls and touring classrooms for an hour in the early afternoon. The hours after school were devoted to staff meetings and an assortment of extra-curricular activities, in which the principal played an active part. The staff, however, perceived the principal not only to be inaccessible, but also to be displaying deliberate avoidance/withdrawal behaviour.

The principal was asked to analyze his own activities <u>within an institutional context</u>. Only then did he recognize the incongruency of the situation which he had brought about, inadvertantly. That early

morning period represented one of the few times during the day when the teachers, free of students, could, individually, seek the principal's counsel. As a corrective measure, the principal immediately rescheduled his own work periods. He communicated to the staff that he would be in his office during that early morning period which would be devoted to individual or group consultations. He also rescheduled his type A tasks to the school's early afternoon 'quiet' period. Almost instantly, the climate within the school improved. The principal did admit, however, that the realignment was difficult for him personally, but that the noticeable improvement in staff morale had made the change worthwhile. All that was required, as it turned out, was a synchronization of activities within the institution.

To summarize this second component of time management, then, individuals as members of organizations must become cogniscent of the fact that they cannot, for the most part, complete their work in isolation. They are required to carry out both type A and type B tasks, but remain subject to the demands of the organization made upon them and, in particular, made upon their time.

A point, although somewhat tangential, is made here relating to the current philosophy of retractive management. Organizational theorists such as Beer (1979) state that institutions should be striving for viability, defined as survival and growth. Yet a relatively common and prevalent cutback 'strategy', one of natural attrition, deals with the objective of survival only, and not with growth. That is, by using a reduced number of employees to meet the existing institutional demands within an unchanged period of time, efficiency has been increased, but productivity remains the same. Individually, then, each employee's

productivity level has increased, but at the expense of time--spending less time on each task. The overall productivity level of the organization, however, has remained constant. Institutions are urged that, despite reduced resources, they do not forget to address the issue of growth.

Moreover, the resource-providers and the social-service organizations cannot forget that their primary goal is to serve the public. Extra human resources must be made available in order to meet society's demands on the organization and, in turn, the organization's demands upon its members. Having only one university librarian on duty during the lunch period which is normally a busy time, for example, conveys the message that the public does not come first. Establishing computer resource centres but providing no expertise on weekends, carries a similar message. Management must continue to grapple with the antithetical concerns of efficiency and effectiveness. The management of time also falls within this ongoing managerial conundrum.

This second time management component, the O is SOS, illustrates organizational dynamics or, more specifically, the interaction or the active adaption that occurs within the institution. Employees, on the one hand, must schedule their work schedules to merge or adjust to the ebb and flow of the organization. But on the other hand, employers must allocate the institution's resources appropriately, to enable the organization as a whole to meet the demands of the public.

S--SCHEDULING

The third and final component of time management, the last S in SOS, is scheduling. This component include two aspects: one, planning and developing the schedules; and two, using and adhering to these time lines.

Scheduling and anticipating expected completion dates are inherent within all organizations. Each unit within the system depends upon inputs as resources which are often the ouputs of another unit. To clarify, many tasks are consecutive; one cannot begin an activity before its predecessor is fully completed. Examinations, for example, must be designed first, in order for them to be printed, then administered, then evaluated. The order of the tasks remains fixed. But some tasks, however, can occur concurrently or simultaneously. Again, all must be completed before the next task or series of tasks in the progression can begin. Presenting a play highlights this latter situation. Preparing the stage, learning the music, practising lines, making costumes--these are only a few of the many activities that occur before the curtain rises on performance night. Deadlines, then, must be known and adhered to by all involved in order to avoid "down time."

Down time refers not only to a loss of time, but to a waste of more than the one resource of time. For example, registrars have, on occasion, hired extra secretarial support and typewriters in order to ensure that all essential paperwork is completed before such events as registration or convocation. If the selection committee has not completed its tasks, or the students' grades have not been submitted by all instructors, both the secretaries and typewriters would be sitting idle. In those instances, human, capital, and fiscal resources would be

wasted. Moreover, the minimal amount of time remaining for the clerical tasks to be completed could require that secretarial overtime be approved or that even more staff must be hired temporarily. Either instance would necessitate additional expenditures.

All tasks, then, must be scheduled--routine and unique tasks alike. But, because routine (type B) tasks are common and recurring within the organization, the individual should be able to approximate and assign a period required for completion, that is, the usual time for each task to be finished. The time log, the documentation of activities, should help in providing this information. Unfortunately, the larger-scale tasks which have been specified as A-type tasks occur less frequently and, in fact, often have no precedent with which to gauge their inherent complexity or the time required for their completion. The skills of planning and scheduling must be acquired so that any task and particularly the type A task be undertaken and finished on time.

Having gone through the first development stage towards the effective management of time, the individual should be able to differentiate activities, specifying those A-type of activities which require time for their planning and scheduling and, accordingly, a quiet period in order to carry out this reflection. The second stage constituting time management has allowed the individual to recognize which periods within the work day or week are more suitable for carrying out the planning needed for this A-type task. Given the opportunity, then, all that remains is for the individual to acquire and implement some fundamental planning and scheduling skills in order to effectively and timely complete these more complex tasks. Consequently, this third and final phase of time management entails the skill development

required for these tasks.

Project or network planning is the current name for this type of planning and scheduling. The methodology of network planning (Harris & Maggard, 1972), incorporates the two previous approaches known as PERT (Program Evaluation and Review Technique) and CPM (Critical Path Method), described by such authors as Moder and Phillips (1964). The techniques, reminiscent of the operational researcher's approach to management of the late 1960's and early 1970's, have returned in popularity, albeit in a somewhat less prescriptive format. Also, the availability of computer software such as Harvard Project Management and MacProject has encouraged the use of the methodology and, in addition, the analysis of large-scale projects.

The principle underlying these now assimilated techniques is referred to as the 'Swiss cheese' principle. The objective of this approach is to reduce large-scale, complex, often generic, or even perhaps amorphous A-type tasks into a series of interconnected but smaller-scale, more routine and well-defined, and hence perceived as more easily accomplished, B-type tasks. Then, by placing some estimated time limits on each of these sub-tasks, the overall project can be scheduled as the aggregate of its subunits and carried out within the pulse of the organization.

A summary of the eight points constituting the project or network planning process is provided below. More detailed information is available from such authors as Harris and Maggard (1972) and Spinner (1981).

1. Clearly identify the overall objective(s) of the project or A-type task.

2. Break down the objective into as many tasks as possible, adhering to the Swiss cheese principle, outlined above.

3. Determine the order of those steps in order to complete the project, realizing that some of the steps may be consecutive, while others may be concurrent.

4. Display the interconnection or interdependence of those steps in some clear fashion, usually in the form of an arrow or a network diagram.

5. Allocate or schedule the resources (people, money, machines, and time) to each of those tasks. Reconsider the order of the tasks. In particular, determine whether certain tasks could occur concurrently rather than sequentially only. Calculate differences in expenditures for each resource, in order to develop a list of alternative strategies. Also, observe where slack occurs, both between and among activities. And finally, consider ways in which to reduce slack or down time.

6. Calculate the time estimated for the overall completion of the project. That time represents the sum of the longest time required to complete those activities. Most large-scale projects can be broken down not only into a series of smaller more short-term tasks, but also into a number of different paths, illustrating that groups of activities occur concurrently as well as consecutively. The completion time for each path must be calculated. The path representing the longest time for project completion is the most important and is called, understandably, the Critical Path. Activities which constitute that critical path should be highlighted.

7. Monitor those activities along the critical path in order to complete the project, and within the time constraints. Similarly, monitor the slack or lag time between activities. Document the actual time for task completion, in order to make comparisons between that and the estimated times. In so doing, future task scheduling and hence project scheduling will become easier and more accurate.

8. Be prepared to replan, reschedule, and re-allocate resources in order to deal with the contingencies that confront any organization. Incorporate some of the options which were developed previously (in number 5 above), in order to compensate for unexpected problems. It must be remembered that time is, essentially, a fixed resource. In order for a task to be completed in half the proposed time, for instance, twice the human, material, and fiscal resources would have to be assigned to that task.

In total, these eight steps constitute the last stage in the time management process. This final S in the SOS framework enforces the notion that time management, as a part of management in general, is not merely intuitive. People are not born as good managers or as good time managers. Such skills must be and are able to be acquired. Ironically, Mintzberg (1976) has documented that managers described themselves as doing very little planning or scheduling. Similarly, studies analyzing what principals do confirm those findings, (e.g., the 1981 Martin and Willower paper). Furthermore, members of social-service organizations agree that neither do they have enough time to do all the tasks that they are assigned, nor do they have the skills to carry out planning and scheduling. Perhaps once these skills are learned and used, and after the times for task completion have been documented, then the work

situation can be reappraised. Without such preliminary activities, it is difficult to assess whether the time pressures of the job are perceived or, indeed, actual.

CONCLUSION

This paper has outlined what is considered to be the three essential components that constitute effective time management within the not-for-profit social-service organizations. The SOS framework suggests that time management is made up of the sequential factors of: one, S, awareness and analysis of self--the types of activities being carried out within the organization and the ways in which time is being wasted); two, O, awareness of the rhythm, the ebb and flow of the normal activities within the organization, and the synchronization of the tasks within the confines of the organization; and three, S, the planning, scheduling, implementation, and evaluation of both large and small-scale tasks.

Individuals in social-serving organizations have identified themselves as being under stress; that stress, the literature says, has been attributed, in part, to inadequate self and time management skills. The help which they require in order to begin to take a more proactive role in both the work environment and in their own stress management has been offered in the form of the SOS framework. And finally, this approach upholds the distinction of social-serving organizations, in both the theory and the practice.

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